

# The Student-Writer

A Little Talk Every Month with Those  
Interested in the Technique of Literature.

Published from the Workshop of Willard E. Hawkins,  
1835 Champa Street, Denver, Colorado.

Vol. I No. 12

December, 1916

ONE YEAR, FIFTY CENTS  
(Until 1917, 25 cents)

**T**HE STUDENT-WRITER'S Christmas present to its subscribers is an extended and improved service. Read the announcements in this issue. The new journalism course under Effie Leese Scott is destined to be a pace-setter. Then there is the associate criticism service conducted by Chauncey Thomas, one of the most virile writers and keenest critics in the country today. C. T.—as his familiar call him—consented to join The Student-Writer staff only on condition that he be allowed absolutely free rein in his criticisms. He has it. Readers are already acquainted with the distinctive and scholarly revision service and verse-criticism under John H. Clifford. Finally, we have the tried and approved regular criticism service and story courses under the editor of The Student-Writer.

Each of these authorities will be represented, space permitting, by a department in the magazine. They are bursting with good things to tell readers, and the extent of their departments will be limited only by the cost of paper. We have now 1,000 subscribers; if the list grows to 2,000 within the year and the new departments of service are patronized as well as the old have been, it will be possible to double—perhaps triple—the number of reading-matter pages. So it is up to you!

## EXTENSION OF THE BOOK OFFER.

A large proportion of subscribers have already taken advantage of the opportunity to secure in permanent form the lessons in writing technique published in the first year's numbers of The Student-Writer. A popular order is a year's subscription to the magazine at 25 cents, and a copy of "Helps for the Student-Writer" at the pre-publication rate of 75 cents, making a total remittance of \$1.00.

As the volume will not be ready for delivery before the end of December, it has been decided to extend the prepublication rate another month. The regular charge for the book after publication will be \$1.00—it is 75 cents if ordered before January, 1917.

"Helps for the Student-Writer" will be not a rebinding of the first twelve issues of the magazine, but an entire reprinting, in attractive form, of the series of practical articles by Willard E. Hawkins on writing problems.

Contents: Can We Afford to be Original?—Have a Standard of Style.—An Aid to Standardization.—Plot and Climax Essentials.—Naming the Characters.—Photoplays or Fiction?—The Attitude of Mind.—"Snowballing" a Plot.—The Stone Wall of Talent.—Why Strive for Unity.—The Precipice of Suspense.—Fixing the Viewpoint.—Word Lenses.—The Place of Technique.—Creative Characterization.—The Law of Rhythmic Development.—"He Said" and "She Said."—The Boiler and the Whistle.—Hackneyed Plots.—The Purpose of Fiction.

### A FEW MORE DAYS OF THE 25-CENT SUBSCRIPTION RATE.

Remember that the subscription rate of The Student-Writer—new or renewal—is 25 cents a year until January 1, 1917; after that it will be 50 cents a year. And you may now subscribe at the 25 cents rate for four years in advance, beginning with any desired number.

## The Student-Writer Announces as an Associate Critic and Literary Adviser

### CHAUNCEY THOMAS,

formerly associate editor of The Smart Set, now associate editor of  
Outdoor Life and Lecturer on English, Denver University.

"Chauncey Thomas is the pioneer living short-story writer of the  
Rockies. He blazed the trail for us all."

WM. MACLEOD RAINIE.

"Chauncey Thomas is a genius."

J. A. MCGUIRE,

Publisher of Outdoor Life.

Among his notable short stories are:

**Why the White Sulphur Mail Was Late** (McClure's, November, 1902), for writing which the United States government named a peak in the Rockies "Mount Chauncey Thomas," and of which the late Jack London said to the author: "C. T. that 'snow story' of yours is equal to any short-story I ever wrote or expect to write."

**Six Pounds Short** (Success Magazine, 1904), considered by foremost critics to be a new plot in the world's literature, and by the editors the most successful short-story ever published in Success.

**The Sheriff of Elbert** (McClure's, April, 1899), selected by the McClure editors as the best short-story appearing in that magazine for the year.

Chauncey Thomas's **Campfire Talks** in Outdoor Life have been pronounced "the strongest and most original series of articles now running in any magazine in America." They have aroused more controversy than anything recently published in American philosophy.

Chauncey Thomas's criticisms are unlike those of any other critic. His methods are peculiarly his own. He is merciless, clear and unprejudiced.

"C. T. would not flatter a manuscript from the President of the United States."

ROBERT AMES BENNETT,

#### FEES.

The fees charged for Chauncey Thomas's criticisms of manuscripts under 10,000 words are:

Individual manuscript .....	\$ 5.00
(Each 10,000 words additional, \$3.00)	
Two manuscripts, in advance .....	8.00
Three manuscripts, in advance .....	10.00

Students so desiring may have Chauncey Thomas as their instructor in the Supervision Course elsewhere explained.

### The Student-Writer Workshop

1835 CHAMPA STREET.

DENVER, COLORADO.

### Revision of Prose and Verse by John H. Clifford.

Mr. Clifford is an authority in matters of style and literary usage. His long experience as a reviser, compiler and editor has been with such leading New York publishing houses as The American Book Co., National Alumni, University Society; also on Encyclopedia Americana, and Worcester and Standard dictionaries, etc.

The opportunity for writers and publishers to obtain such authoritative and experienced help as Mr. Clifford offers in his particular line is unusual. The fees for his service are quoted elsewhere.

Mr. Clifford's efficient and scholarly help is particularly recommended for verse writers.

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Entered as second-class matter April 21, 1916, at the post office at Denver, Colo.

## THE PURPOSE OF FICTION.

A CORRESPONDENT recently propounded the query: "Do you consider the ultimate question in fiction one of method?" That is a big subject, and the answer can not be given offhand. I replied that I considered the ultimate question in fiction to be the providing of vicarious experience for readers. Viewed in this light, the question of matter or method sinks into insignificance. As well ask a famished man whether he wishes to drink because he realizes that water contains elements needed to support life, or because it affects his palate pleasantly. He will reply: "Because I'm dying of thirst!"

The fundamental purpose behind every phenomenon is the answering of a need. It is not alone in physics that nature abhors a vacuum. To ascertain the purpose of any institution or thing, discover the need that it supplies. If a need arises, a new thing is created. If the need vanishes, the thing atrophies and becomes extinct. To the naturalist, this is a self-evident fact. In reading one of the books of Colorado's nature-philosopher, Enos Mills, I was impressed by a comment on the lodgepole pine, which, instead of dropping its cones, retains them, imbedded sometimes deep in the trunk, until a fire sweeps over the region. The fire melts the wax of the cones, releasing the seeds, and thus insuring that the forest will be replanted. Think of a law so elemental, yet so complex, that in response to a need caused by the depredations of lightning, ages ago, a tree was developed which depended upon forest fires for its perpetuation!

All are familiar with the simpler illustrations of this law. The flower of a plant fills a need—to attract the insects that carry pollen from bloom to bloom and thus fertilize the plant. The leaves of a tree, the shell of a crab, the gills of a fish, the wings of a bird, the brain and nervous system of a man, are specialized developments that came in response to needs for nourishment, protection, and preservation of the species. The need came first and the faculty second. Had it not been for the needs that rose in the exigencies of our existence, we should still be amoebas. Evidently the more needy a man is, the better his chance of becoming something other

than a nucleated mass of protoplasm. This should be good news to writers!

Many things, it is true, seem to us the very reverse of needs. It is only by analogy that we begin to realize, for instance, that such things as sickness, conflagrations, and wars are with us for our own good—each to fill a need. What the need is we may only speculate—probably it is to teach mankind how to avoid the errors that cause them.

Back of all this again is the question of why we need needs. The only answer is—for the sake of progress. Viewed in this light, it is better that mankind should be visited by calamities. Under utopian conditions we should stand still. Evolution is a constant reaching forward to catch up with our needs.

But we never shall catch up, for the primary need of the human race is experience. Out of experience we build toward perfection. By touching a heated radiator, the child learns through pain to keep away from hot objects. It is necessary for the savage to learn the elementary lessons that come from fighting, from being tortured, from slaying and being slain. As he progresses, it becomes necessary for him to learn by bitter experience to avoid unsanitary conditions, brutal practices, covetousness, selfishness, and other errors. Some of these lessons are still but half learned by people who call themselves civilized.

Though the gaining of experience is likely to be painful, it is sought after with almost violent eagerness. The desire of mankind for experience—or sensation, as it may be called—is like the parching thirst of the famished man. The great problem is to get enough of it to dull the craving. The savage did not fight merely because he was forced to; he fought because he gloried in it—because he thirsted for the exquisite sensation of carving and being carved. Nor is the savage spirit—the craving for elemental sensation—weeded out of us in this day. In many ways we deliberately seek pain because it provides extreme sensation. Boxing is an evident outgrowth of the desire to give and take punishment. Football, bronco "busting," riding the "roller-coaster," taking cold baths, eating or drinking highly seasoned viands—all these are enjoyed because they satisfy the thirst for sensation.

But along with the savage in man has been a development of subtle senses whose cravings for sensation are not to be satisfied by coarse physical pain. Battling with a club will not satisfy the newly awakened esthetic sense. Therefore, man seeks the art gallery, the concert hall, the great scenic outdoors, for experiences that will come within the scope of his new senses. And with this greater sensitiveness has come a demand for variety. The shopkeeper, for instance, lives a comparatively monotonous life,

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which nowhere near satisfies his thirst for—say experiences of the savage order. The factory girl has no way of satisfying her longings for esthetic sensation.

What is the result? Denied personal experiences in accord with their desires, they seek vicarious satisfaction. The shopkeeper, to appease his appetite for crude physical pain and action, becomes a patron of the prize ring. Lacking the physical constitution or the opportunity to stand up to an antagonist and exchange blow for blow, he drinks in the experience by watching professionals crouch in a smoke-filled arena and hammer each other to a knockout.

The esthetic factory girl, on the other hand, goes home and reads Marie Corelli or Robert W. Chambers (perhaps we do her an injustice), and thus takes the edge off of her craving by living for a time in a realm above the sordid whirl of machinery, the ugly tenement, and the unwashed dishes waiting in the sink.

As these two satisfy their thirst, so practically does all civilization satisfy its experience desires. Theater, baseball arena, football field, magazine and novel—all are direct outgrowths of the craving and the real need of humanity for more experience than the daily routine can supply. It is possible for a man in one day now to live a more varied life and acquire more experience than the primitive man could know in a lifetime. He may rise in the morning and write a thousand words of a novel in which—by the aid of his creative imagination—he ventures into the frozen North and fights a despairing battle with the elements. After breakfast, he may live for a few hours the life of a not too busy twentieth-century business man, closing his desk at eleven o'clock to listen to a lecture which takes him through the peaceful moorlands of the mountain-tops, over rocky passes, down stupendous gorges, and to the brink of glaciers and volcanoes. At a commercial-club luncheon following, he is taken by the speaker of the occasion to war-infested Europe and shown the pitiful state of a devastated country. In the afternoon he attends a "movie," where he lives through a turmoil of hazards with the fearless Helen, and chuckles through an impossible episode with Charley Chaplin. After supper, he attends the theater to lose himself in a tense melodrama of the Kentucky mountains, and on returning home puts himself to sleep by reading the latest issue of Zippy Stories. May his dreams be undisturbed!

All of these are real experiences—not as intense, of course, as if lived in actual fact, but intense enough to build themselves into his brain. The narrative is the most convenient device for supplying the need of complex humanity for more experience than the daily routine will supply; hence the origin of the story-teller's

art. Hence also the statement that the purpose of fiction is to provide vicarious experience for readers.

In putting this principle into practice, the essential thing for the writer is to know his audience. The readers of a certain type of magazine yearn for adventure, fighting, and violent physical action. This means that if such readers were to choose the life they would live, they would choose such a life as this magazine commonly pictures. They would choose to be such persons as are the heroes of these tales—virile, fearless, and masterful. Any other type of central character would spoil the story for readers of this magazine, because they have no desire to think of themselves as playing other parts.

An attraction toward the opposite sex is shared by all; hence, love stories, in which we can assume the identity of a man or woman involved in a romance, are always in demand. The maid whose life is starved and sordid hungers to experience the sensations of a queen or a society belle, and so devours the novel featuring a lovely and wealthy heroine sought by a multitude of correctly tailored wooers. To the average reader two kinds of fiction have their appeal. One kind goes beyond his experience and gives him a totally new set of sensations. The other appeals to him because it calls up cherished experiences that he has had and helps him to live them over—is intensified by his real knowledge of the setting and conditions.

For the writer it is well to realize the need of presenting in every story at least one chief character with whom, in imagination, the reader can link himself. To enjoy the experiences of a story hero, we must live his life, and it is far pleasanter to imagine ourselves brave, resourceful, generous, and altogether admirable than to put ourselves into the position of a contemptible character. Many a story has been rejected because the hero—though perhaps true to life—was a little below the standard of heroism, honesty, or strength.

For every sort of experience there is perhaps an audience. One audience yearns for red-blooded adventure, another desires only experiences of an esthetic order, another cares more for romantic thrills, while still another revels in the unpleasant and sordid. The story that pleases only one of these audiences has a limited appeal. The "popular" writer is one whose work has an appeal to more than one audience. As a matter of fact, the composite reader represented by the public is an intricate blend of desires. He is neither wholly esthetic in his tastes nor wholly savage. The story of red-blooded action only partly satisfies him; nor is he wholly satisfied with the story of purely esthetic appeal. The author who can satisfy him must be able to run the whole

gamut of his desires—or the effect is thin. For this reader, a story must have a theme of broad significance, a melody of romance, an accompaniment of adventure, an obbligato of humor, many arpeggios of suspense, subnotes of tragedy, variations of atmosphere—at least this much to give the story a full, rich orchestration.

The average writer can not reach the general audience to which, for example, *The Saturday Evening Post* appeals, because he has not the range needed to touch responsive chords in the average composite reader. If I should hear the band play a new and catchy piece of music, I could perhaps go to the piano and pick out the melody from memory—that being all that I heard with sufficient clarity to distinguish it. But a musician would hear so much more, and with even greater distinctness, that he could reproduce the piece with all its richness of harmony. Fully as much difference exists between the writer who can write a perfectly good story, adapted to readers of a definitely limited type, and one who can write a story that satisfies the many-sided reader. The reason why there are comparatively few leading names in fiction, in spite of the great number of good writers, is that few men or women have the “ear” or the ability to feel the whole gamut of individual or racial desires. When I read a story that seems to me the offspring of such a “range,” no matter how crude in technique it may be, I begin to look for a future “name” in fiction. And I have picked some “winners” by recognizing this evidence of potential mastery.

Most writers are more limited in range than they realize. This is natural—we all have difficulty in recognizing that there are things of importance outside of those that interest us. The writer who lacks philosophy can not understand why his stories are accepted only by magazines catering to the superficial. The writer who does not care for romance fails to understand why the editors term his deeply philosophical narratives uninteresting. The writer whose interests are confined to domestic and feminine problems wonders why she can not extend her field beyond the household magazines.

The range necessary to reach a broader audience can be cultivated. The simplest way of doing this is to find out the class of people to whom your stories do not appeal, and begin to aim directly at them. Study their interests, understand them, at least, even if you can not wholly sympathize with them. If you have thus far been limited to the purely adventure type of story, forget for a time the man readers who form the bulk of your audience, and consider the debutante, to whom it is probable that your type of story has now no appeal whatever. Work out the problem of gaining her interest. Think of her as your audience, and after analyzing her desires and motives, when you have this audience



definitely fixed in mind, go over some of your purely adventure stories and play up features that will appeal to her. Then, if you can think of some auditor who is not interested in anything that the revised story represents—neither adventure nor romance—try to play up some phases that will broaden its field in that direction. Say, for instance, that you adapt it to the professor of philosophy in a college, or the minister of your church. If you succeed in these particulars, you will find that the story is richer in appeal than your average. Though you will still be sticking to the adventure story, your forte, it will not be a *mere* adventure story. It will have the elements of a fascinating romance, a deeper significance, and an uplift tone—hence, a wider audience, a broader appeal.

On the other hand, if you have been limited thus far to live stories for the women's magazines, extend your field by studying men's activities and interests. Adapt this advice to yourself.

But don't become too ambitious to stray into other pastures until you have definitely nipped the grass of one. Concentrate particularly on those qualities and features that preponderate in the magazines you would like to enter.

After all is said, nothing in fiction seems to matter except our success in laying before readers incidents that they can live through with real profit and with the result of definitely enlarging their experience bumps.

—W. E. H.

## THE DUBIOUS DASH.

BY JOHN H. CLIFFORD.

**A**MONG the many fine and elusive points considered by technical writers on punctuation none is more subject to query than the now all-serviceable em dash (—), and none is more troublesome to untrained writers.

We have no space here for any general discussion of the use of the dash. Remembering the learned German professor who lamented at last having devoted his life to the study of the Greek article, when he ought to have confined himself to the accent, the nontechnical writer on punctuation will do well to limit his inquiries to specific matters.

Our present purpose is to call attention to the question of using a comma and a dash together. Regarding this, both authorities and usages differ. Here is a little handbook of style that says, "A comma and a dash are not used together," and leaves the matter so. And when we find the modest handbook confirmed by so high an authority as the late Theodore L. De Vinne, who objected to such use of the comma and the dash—as well as to joint use of the colon and the dash—we feel that we are safe in avoiding the practice, although it still obtains in some publishing houses.

As usually distinguished, the comma "is used to mark the slightest actual turn or jointure in grammatical construction," while "the dash



is used to denote a sudden change in the construction, a sudden interruption or irregularity." But in familiar practice, this most irregularly used of punctuation points is made "to do service for commas, parentheses, and all cases of doubt."

In some books on punctuation examples are cited of both uses of the dash—with the comma and without it. In the first issue of *The Student-Writer* (January, 1916) we make use of the style book of the United Typothetae of America, one of the rules cited being as follows:

Dashes are often used to set off a parenthetical clause. When they are, and when a comma would be placed after the word immediately preceding the first dash were the clause omitted, insert the comma, and also use the same point just before the last dash. If no mark would be used were the parenthetical clause omitted, then none is required with it.

Inasmuch as this rule has not seemed to us to accord with the more logical practice now in favor, we have not bound ourselves by it, nor have we submitted it as an authoritative guide for our readers and writers.

In order to ascertain the usage of leading publications, we have examined many of them with care. So far as we can judge, most of the chief newspapers and magazines of the country use the dash without the comma. In a late number of *The American Review of Reviews* we noticed but one instance of comma and dash together—the comma perhaps having crept in while the proof reader was out. *McClure's*, *Harper's*, *The Forum*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Literary Digest*—a notable exemplar—we found uniformly using the dash without the comma, except in one curious case where evidently a concession was made to the author of a poem.

With pains we examined two recent numbers of *The Atlantic Monthly*. In one we counted 37 instances of the use of comma and dash together, and 235 instances of the dash without the comma. If use of the comma was correct in the 37 cases, it is safe to suppose that in many other cases its use was equally called for. We are inclined to account for the exceptional 37 instances on the score of inadvertence or the like. In a recent issue of *The Century*, which uses the combination, we found instances of obvious confusion and lapsing into the other style.

We may add that recent books examined, including various classes of literary works, cyclopedias, dictionaries, etc., favored the use of the dash without an accompanying comma.

Harry Stephen Keeler, prolific author and editor of the *10 Story Book of Chicago*, writes an interesting letter from which we cannot forbear quoting:

Dear Hawkins: Was sitting down in the front row of a vaudeville house here Sunday night, all by my lonesome, and our mutual friend J. W. Voss came down the aisle and dropped into my seat, leaving his two "lady friends" way back in the theatre. We talked at length about you and your magazine, the show was so dull; and he showed me your letter in which you said you envied Keeler his ability to turn out salable fiction with such regularity. Man alive! Don't envy me! Every time my mill starts to run with that regularity someone throws a monkey wrench into the machinery, and the blamed editors knock and bump my novelettes till I'm ready to throw up my hands and quit. Then, just as I'm ready to quit for good, the luck turns and I again seem to begin to land 'em in succession. The man that invented the literary game should have been hung, in my estimation. When I think of the sweat and blood and energy and skill and judgment and time and brain cudgeling I've put forth in the last three years of straight professional writing, I realize I might have run a railroad on the same mental steam. And yet, we all stay in it!

Let me compliment you on your stuff in *The Student-Writer*. You sure are putting out some practical stuff for the writer. If I had come across something of that sort when I was reading every technical book on the market, I should have cried with joy. I got it all through hard knocks, when I might have waited a few years till Willard Hawkins put it in concrete laws and news print.

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## A CAMPFIRE TALK ON WRITING.

BY CHAUNCEY THOMAS.

(Though The Student-Writer's new associate critic offered to write a brand-new article for this issue, we decided to introduce him to readers by giving a sample of his widely famous "Campfire Talks," especially this one, which happens to deal with writing. This is a characteristic Chauncey Thomas article. We want to hear what readers think of it. And if you think well enough to send in lots of comments and subscriptions and orders for his services—why, next month, we'll have another of his articles—and as many more will follow as we can buy paper to print.—EDITOR.)

LATELY I had occasion to criticize a book of verse by a certain beginner—a total stranger to me—and I am afraid I handled it rather roughly. But it contained merit, buried at times out of sight, under many and various errors and crudities. To my surprise the writer, a woman, too, wrote and thanked me and asked for more. In reply I wrote the letter that follows, but before mailing it I showed it to others whose opinion I value in such matters, and one and all, they urged me to publish it—and so here is the letter for what it is worth:

Your kind letter just received. Generally they hate me. I don't know just what variety of animal your friends call "a student"—and it doesn't matter—just you go on figuring out how to do it. Anybody, anything, can learn. Keep pounding away and in time you will improve, not all at once, like sunrise, but gradually, more than you realize. Old Mss. are good measuring sticks, and when you pick up a hopeful of two years ago and say, "Ugh! did I write that?" then you have improved. And know that you have.

There is no cut-and-dried cure-all in writing any more than in medicine. All you can do is to try, not like the gambler, just hit and miss, but more like a farmer—plow, seed, reap and see what you have. Every crop is but a bet on the weather, remember.

I can help you in prose, but in verse you must look elsewhere for the technical part. I know nothing of it, as Allah left music out of my make-up. I love it, but cannot carry a tune, and verse is but prose set to tune. Verse must be good prose, remember, before it can be good verse. Prose plus music equals poetry, as I would express it in algebra.

One must know the history of our tongue if he would use it with sense. Many of the grammarians do not know the history of the language, hence the absurd positions they often take. "It is I" or "It is me," for example. One is the Latin form, the other is the French form, while "I am it" is the old Anglo-Saxon way. All three are correct, if used with taste.

And this thing of "taste" is perhaps the most important of all. There is no cut-and-dried receipt for that any more than there is for taste in other things, such as dress, manners or painting, or music. It is got only by absorption, by association with what is considered the best. You can get that, I think, by reading the best English poetry aloud, usually to yourself. 'Tis like learning how to dance, or fence, or box. You have to go through certain motions—in your mind—each one awkward when alone—and you are conscious of it; but as they become automatic and blend into a series of motions, and finally practically one unconscious motion, you have grace, skill or good taste.

Reading in silence is not nearly as good, as that exercises only the receptive organs of the brain—verbally—while reading aloud exercises

not only the receptive but also the reproductive mental verbal processes. But don't memorize verses, nor stick to one poet, or one class of poets. Then you become merely a second edition, and hopeless. 'Tis the unconscious mingling of the best poets you are after, and out of that, plus You, comes a good style of your own—if you are to have a good style at all, I mean. Of course many cannot dance, nor fence, nor sing, nor paint, nor write. That all rests with Fate and your forbears. One thing is sure, however, you never can if you don't try, even if you may fail if you do try. And if you want to write you must try.

Now, as to my overhauling of your book, please note carefully this distinction: A friend is kind to the writer but merciless to what is written. 'Tis much as if you took your child to a doctor. Suppose the M. D. always had a fit over every child brought to him, and sent the proud mother away walking like a blind horse? He would be popular among the womenfolks—"HE said my child was PERFECT . . ."—but how about it? The child develops into a weakling and fails in the world's work.

Now, you take it to a doctor who cares nothing about what Mama may think of him. He isn't making love to Mama, remember, but trying to help the child. He says: "Its eyes need attention, its teeth are crooked, its spine is bent, and you are not feeding it right. Ice cream and cucumbers, beer, lobster salad and mince pie? I thought so. Do this. Do that. Cut off this cataract, pull that decayed tooth, and give the one behind it a chance to come out. And in time you may have a good man child . . ." The brute! But if you follow his advice you may have in time a fine youngster and thank said unfeeling M. D. some twenty years later.

Now, the mutual admiration societies are like the first doctor, and a few inhuman, unflattering brutes are like the second doctor. Take your choice. I care nothing for Mama. I'm working for the kids.

Never, if you would write, read a Mss. to a collection of people yourself. Have some one read it aloud to some one—or two at the most—if they will pick flaws in it, and for no other purpose. But to read Mss. for hand-clapping is sheer ruin. 'Tis like whisky—will get any writer in time, beginner or old hand. The difference between those who would write and those who would shine is whether they are grateful or resentful when a flaw is found. And a perfect piece of work is one in which no one—anywhere in the world—can pick a flaw.

The second poison to avoid is trying to beat another writer. It matters not if Smith or Jones—if you or I—can draw the nearest perfect circle. Draw just to make a perfect circle, if you can, regardless of Jones, Smith, me, or anyone else. Personal rivalry is cheap, and fatal to good work. I fancy that the best writer in the United States today is sucking his big toe in some farmhouse, with "Goo-goo" as the present limits of his vocabulary. But he will probably never equal Bryant. 'Tis the work, not the writer, that counts.

And this is why practically no women have been great artists or writers. They cannot divorce themselves personally from their work. It is a drawback, ingrained, due to their sense of motherhood. "My child" is perfect, else the race die out. Now, this same idea unconsciously makes them—women—resent criticism of their "brain child," and they instinctively begin to fight to protect it from the critic, or the world, instead of joining hands with said fault-finder to correct the flaw, as a man will. The woman is proud of the regiment and doesn't want to hurt it by charging the hill. The man will annihilate the regiment if he thereby gains the hill. That is what the regiment is for, in his mind; but the woman wants to keep it just as it is. Of course, I am speaking of men who do things, not mere shirt stuffers.

Try to overcome this mother-instinct handicap in your work as much as possible, as it is a serious drawback, as I've said, and the chief reason why women have never written anything great in the world—things of the first class, I mean—like Shakespeare, Keats, or Omar.

Hereafter I am going to quit this thing of criticizing work, unless well paid for it. I find that most want flattery, and if they don't get it, then I've made an enemy and gained nothing. And I'll not praise poor work. 'Tis only an indirect way of stealing, and handicaps those who would really do good work. I will criticize for a few women—those who want to write—but most who write want only to shine. Just so they "get in"—that's enough. Poor work is as good as any, just so they can see their names in print, and hence pose accordingly. I refuse to assist.

Like a sword before it is tempered, the harder a Mss. is hammered before it is published the better. As for these "don't-touch-it-or-it-busts" Mss.—take 'em away; I haven't time or patience for that kind of thing. And if you would do good work, I suggest you ponder this over, and adopt the same course. Show your Mss. to only a few, and those with sense and fearlessness. And if any of them find no faults and praise it—or you—then do not show them any more Mss.

Keep them as pleasant personal acquaintances, of course, but don't talk about writing with them; sidetrack the subject if they bring it up. The real critic, remember, is all those who will read your book boiled down into one. If you print your stuff you cannot avoid criticism, and 'tis better to have it on the Mss. where mistakes can be corrected. Seek adverse criticism, court it, and be grateful for it. Regard praise as a sweet poison; like wine, a little is pleasant, even a benefit, but much is ruin. And it grows on one—the craving for literary praise—like drink. Once acquired, the habit is fatal.

If you can stand the harpooning, I will be glad, very glad, to help you in your work. I know just four men and one woman that are of this kind. I hope I am of some help to them, and I know they are of much help to me. For no one can well write alone. ONE MUST have intelligent ADVERSE criticism of his work, or he goes backward. Some of the others who have come to me, or who, I have assumed, really wanted to do good work, get the idea that "you are jumping on ME," when I jump on their work; in other words, cannot disconnect themselves and their work as two separate things. I loved my father, for example, but if he had asked me what I thought of his prize-fighting ability I'd have said "no good."

Praising poor work for personal gain is the most subtle way to injure any artist. And if the writer cannot regard his work as something entirely apart from himself, then he is no artist, is not born to the work and belongs in another field. Booth said that the most sincere applause he ever had on the stage was when the audience hissed his iago. They were hissing iago, not Booth, and the hisses meant perfect acting. The other kind want applause, handclaps, for their iagos—anything for applause, anything—not realizing that hisses for iago was applause of the highest kind for Booth. I know several men whose work is splendid, but I would not sit at the same table with them; on the other hand, I know several of the finest men in the United States who can't write a laundry bill.

The first step in writing is to disconnect yourself and your work; otherwise you stop right there, and that is why there are so few good writers and so little good writing. "Love me, love my dog" is the essence of the nonartist. He may crave, but he never can do. Draw circles for their own sake. When a man has drawn a perfect circle that does not mean that therefore he himself is perfect. One circle may be an acci-

dent—see the large number of “one-story writers”—the artist can draw a good circle most of the time, and even he draws some poor ones occasionally—in fact, about four times out of five.

If you care to play the game, do good work, and pass up flattery, I shall be glad to do all I can toward helping you, not that I know it all, but that each can help the other all around the inky circle, if they are working toward one common point—good work. But if each is seeking to advance himself, and uses writing only as a means and not an end in itself, then they are all like a team of mules each pulling in a different direction—and I'm out of it, even if I have to go it alone.

Out in the world are plenty others seeking good work for its own sake, and if you have to stand alone in your town, then stand alone. You will have plenty of company in the bigger places who will respect you for it, and take you in as a fellow workman.

So ends the letter. It omits ten important things to one said. Straight writing is straight thinking—nothing more. All the study in the world will not make you write one bit better; all the technique ever discovered or taught can only make you your own critic and your own editor. It cannot help you in the actual writing of anything; in fact, if you have a good critic—one who cares nothing for your vanity but everything for your work—then you do not need a knowledge of the technical part of writing.

As in all other things, rules are a help to a beginner and a hindrance to the master. But you must first be able to do everything within the rules before you can do anything outside of them. Master rules, then forget them. A rule is but a substitute for judgment. But study words, words, words, and still more words. These are your tools. Just play on the reader's mind as you would on a piano, with words as keys—that is all there is to writing.

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I am driven to expression of appreciation of your article, “The Boiler and the Whistle.” You have said here many things that I have thought, but never quite adequately expressed in words. Doubtless I shall quote you. The Student-Writer always contains something fresh and helpful. It was a happy thought.

Prominent Western Journalist does not always agree with the editor, but enjoys reading.

I value The Student-Writer very highly; not altogether, perhaps not chiefly, for the things you say but for the perfect way in which they are said. Your style—if that's the right word—is so clear, so smooth, so free from any apparent effort except the effort to be understood, that it is a delight to read what you write, whether one wholly agrees with it or not.

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J. S. DILLON, Editor.

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